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The Jesuit tradition values quality education for all — DACA students included

BY SHANE P. MARTIN, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 01/29/18 11:00 AM ET

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As the education deans of the nation's Jesuit colleges and universities, we are compelled to join our [university presidents](#) and [others](#) who have raised their collective voices to support our students in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Through our work, we prepare the teachers, principals and other educational support providers for our nation's youths. The Jesuit educational tradition values the right of all people to a meaningful and quality education, which is transformative for both learner and teacher.

Our DACA students are no exception. Through no fault of their own, they came to the United States in search of opportunities. They have been documented and thoroughly vetted, are among our most successful students, and are preparing for positions of leadership and service in various industries in the United States. Deporting these young people just as they are poised to make strong contributions to this country — after investing so many resources to educate them in our public schools — is poor public policy and not in the public interest.

As education leaders, we are aware of the unintended consequences that deportation, or even the threat of deportation, has on an entire school community. For example, in the Los Angeles Unified School District — the second largest in the country — roughly one in four students is undocumented or has a parent who is undocumented. Although these numbers may seem dramatic, Los Angeles is not unlike other large urban cores in our country. This reality forces the question: what are the unintended consequences for our school communities under a constant threat of deportation?

The story of Yuleni and her sister Fatima, young students in Los Angeles schools and the daughters of [Romulo Avelica-González](#), helps to put human faces on these dire consequences. Immediately after Romulo, an undocumented immigrant, dropped off Yuleni at school last February, he was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials as Fatima caught the arrest on camera.

This parent's arrest at the schoolhouse door for being undocumented had a chilling ripple effect on the whole school community, even [prompting the school to tell students whose parents are in the United States illegally to develop family plans for what to do if a parent is detained or deported](#). No child should have to bear this burden. Under these conditions, it is near impossible for students to learn and for teachers to teach. When loved ones feel unsafe under the [threat of deportation](#), the [teaching and learning of all of the children in our P-12 schools suffer tremendously](#). For those of us in education, that is the most significant unintended consequence of this misguided policy.

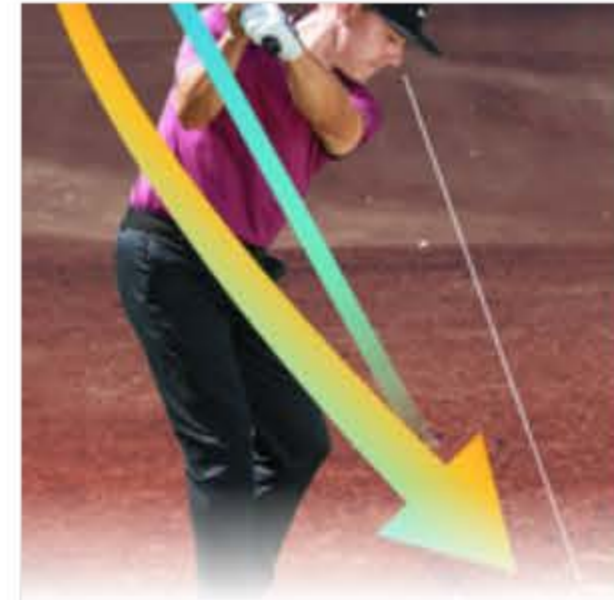
Ending the DACA program would have a ripple effect in other ways. Approximately [800,000 people have enrolled](#) in the program since its inception in 2012, joining the workforce and reducing the number of unauthorized immigrant households living in poverty. Of these individuals, 250,000 have enrolled in a college or university since 2014. Most of the DACA-eligible students rely on their DACA-provided work permits to pay for the costs of education. Working to pay for school is a time-honored American tradition — with the loss of their work permits, these young people may not be able to pay their own way, finish college and give back to the country that supported them. Who will bear the educational costs of a quarter-million people who no longer are able to work?

In addition, [it is estimated](#) that the end of DACA could mean that the United States would lose 20,000 K-12 teachers, many of whom are bilingual. Losing such a large number of teachers during a time of [teacher shortages](#) would have a negative impact on our public schools. While there are a range of views on DACA as a public policy, the reality is that we are too far down the road to end a program that allows so many people to help advance our nation's promise.

DACA students contribute greatly to the common good of American society. The United States of America is their home. They participated in the DACA program in good faith and have much to offer this country through their hard work and talent. We cannot betray them by ending the program and sending them to countries they do not even know. As noted above, deporting DACA students or their undocumented family members will have repercussions beyond the individuals and families involved; such actions disrupt the education of entire communities.

As a society, we cannot afford the unintended educational consequences such policy actions would have. We urge our leaders to find a permanent solution for the DACA program for the benefit of our youths and our country.

Shane P. Martin, Ph.D., dean of Loyola Marymount University School of Education, writes on behalf of the [Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities Conference of Education Deans](#).



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